



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Region 4 Headquarters
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405
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Environmental Assessment Decision Notice for the Proposed Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Project At Giant Springs State Park March 17, 2009

Description of Proposed Action: Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposes to allow the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) to construct a Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Project Trail on a portion of FWP property in Giant Springs State Park near the intersection of River Drive and Giant Springs Rd. This project is also in cooperation with the City of Great Falls and Recreational Trails, Inc. After MDT completes the project, FWP will accept responsibility for long-term maintenance in a manner similar to other portions of the River's Edge Trail on FWP property.

This proposed trail is one part of the larger Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Project CM5299 that MDT is designing and planning for the Great Falls community. The project on FWP property will provide a protected trail connection with the existing River's Edge Trail and provide pedestrians and bicyclists a safe travel path instead of using heavily traveled Giant Springs Rd and River Drive.

Public Process and Comments: A draft Environmental Assessment regarding this proposed action was posted on February 11, 2009 in the Recent Public Notices section of the FWP public website. Public comments were taken for 30 days through March 11, 2009. Legal notices were printed twice each in the *Great Falls Tribune* and *Helena Independent Record*. Email notices of the posted EA were sent to the City of Great Falls Planning Department, Great Falls Recreation and Parks, Recreational Trails Inc., the US Forest Service, Great Falls Bicycle Club, and a local running club. A printed copy was provided to Cascade County Planning Printed as well as the two businesses near the proposed project, Central Plumbing and Heating and Masco/Western Maintenance. A copy of the EA was placed in the Region 4 HQ lobby for public review.

Three comments were received via email during the comment period; all were supportive of the project.

Below is a summary of the comments:

1) I like the idea of a way to get people off the road and out of traffic. At this time there is no sidewalk on 38th street or a safe crossing for the Highway. The lighted intersection at 38th street has been improved from the original design, so large trucks can make the turn without swinging out into on coming traffic. It still is not friendly to foot or bicycle traffic at this time. Now most joggers and bicycle riders stay off the road and use the dirt trail they made as it is safer. We still will have the few bicycle riders who cut out in front of traffic and run the red lights on their way to the river trail. Most trail user's I believe will welcome a safe a convenient way of access to the river trail.

2) Thanks for the opportunity to review the Draft EA for the Giant Springs State Park Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Project. The document presents a thoughtful and thorough analysis of impacts in creating this long-awaited improvement to River's Edge Trail. The project will certainly improve the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists wishing to access the State Park, LCIC and River's Edge Trail from northeast Great Falls neighborhoods.

I agree with the Narrative Summary and with all comments made in the Environmental Review Checklist. The only nitpicking change I can see would be to add an apostrophe to Rivers (River's) Edge Trail throughout.

Thanks for your good work in preparing this document and for FWP's partnership with the City of Great Falls, MDT and RTI in making a better, safer and more welcoming trail for Great Falls residents and visitors.

3) I reviewed the EA. Looks like your guys did a thorough and appropriate job. Please proceed with the project as proposed.

Cultural Review Completed by MDT: In the draft EA, reference was made to the responsibility of MDT to conduct a cultural review of the project area. At the time the EA was posted for public comment the final report was not available from MDT, but a verbal report was provided to FWP by Steve Platt, MDT Environmental Services Bureau that there were no significant findings. Mr. Platt's final report was received by FWP on February 25, 2009 and will be included with the documentation prepared for the Environmental Assessment, and is available for public review. Mr. Platt states in the cover letter for his report that "the project area itself consists of ground that is almost 100% disturbed. I found no cultural resources within the proposed project area."

Decision: Based on the Environmental Assessment and public comment, it is my decision to approve the proposed action and allow MDT to construct the proposed bicycle and pedestrian trail on FWP property, and assume long-term maintenance responsibility for the completed trail.

In accordance with FWP policy, an appeal may be made by any person who has either commented in writing to the department on the proposed project, or who has registered or commented orally at a public meeting held by the department on the proposed project, or who can provide new evidence that would otherwise change the proposed plan. An appeal must be submitted to the Director of FWP in writing and must be postmarked or received within 30 days of this decision notice. The appeal must describe the basis for the appeal, how the appellant has previously commented to the department or participated in the decision-making process, and how the department can provide relief. The appeal should be mailed to: Director, Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 East 6th Avenue, Helena, MT 59620.

Since this is a MDT effort, a portion of this project may proceed independent of FWP's appeal process. FWP is working with MDT to accommodate the process for the portion of the trail to be located on FWP property.

/S/
Graham Taylor
Acting Regional Supervisor